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by

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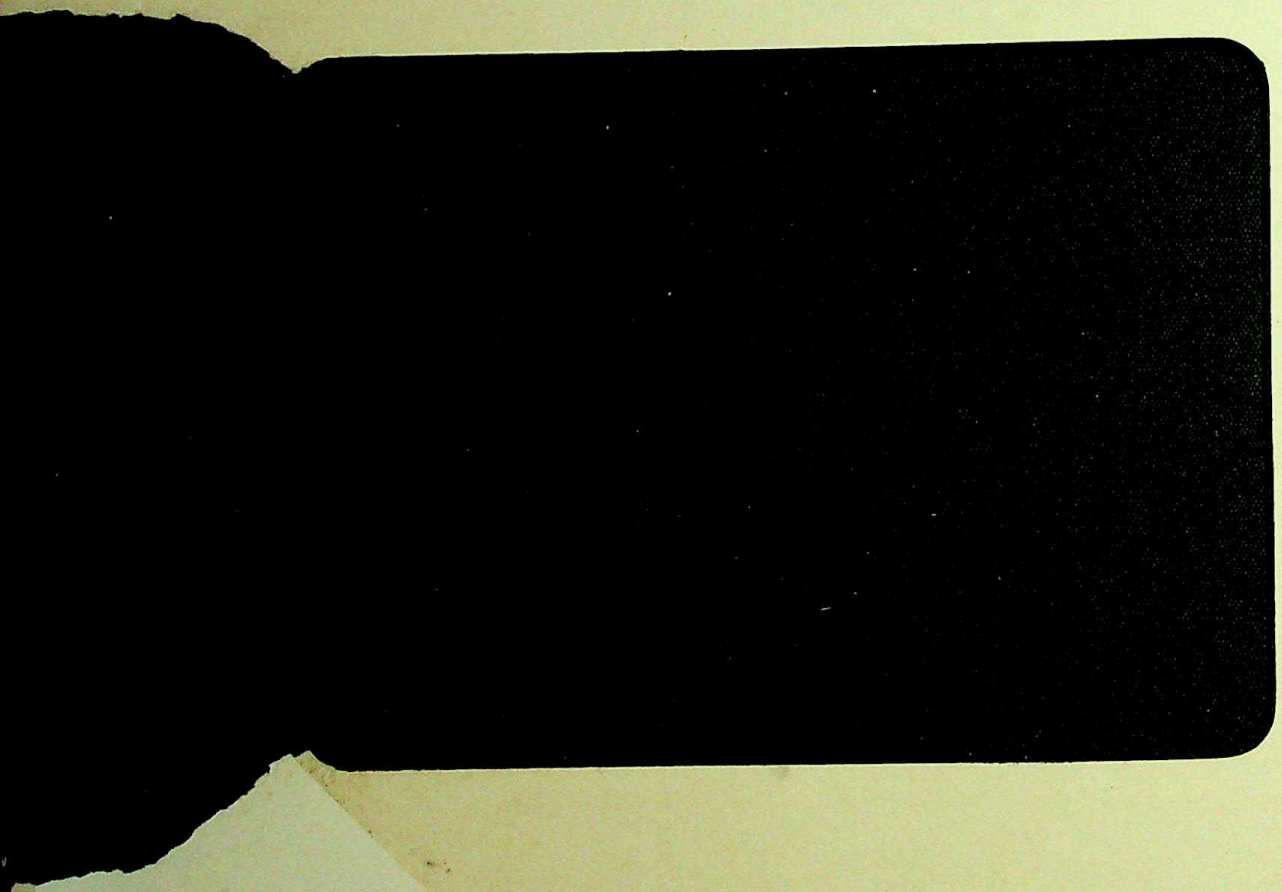

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CASTE, CLASS AND COMMUNITY IN BIHAR POLITICS*

by

Rajendra Ram**

The year 1967 had been significant one in connection with the beginning of a process of change in Bihar pertaining to the study of "caste, class and community in Bihar politics", which is much publicised theme today. Mahamaya Prasad Sinha had taken an oath as the Chief Minister of Bihar on 5 March 1967 after the resignation of Krishna Ballabh Sahay on 4 March 1967. K.B. Sahay and his five cabinet ministers on account of charges of corruption and irregularities had become so much controversial. On 1 October 1967, through an ordinance, the Aiyyer Commission was constituted for making an inquiry of charges of corruption levelled against them. It was the first inquiry commission in Bihar after the independence under the chairmanship of T.L. Venkataraman Aiyyer who in his final Report submitted on 5 February 1970 had given a heart rending remark: "This commission had been directed to investigate 189 charges levelled

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* This paper was presented at a seminar organised by the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and Indian Council of Historical Research on 17th November, 1994.

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against six state leaders. This should clearly be understood that this was merely a fact finding tribunal which had nothing to do with politics. I have made this investigation not with fear from man but with fear from God. I expect through submitting this report that it would act as a force of inspiration in keeping clean and strengthening the administrative system of Bihar. From the very beginning Bihar had been playing important role in the political and cultural life of this country. Maharshi Yajnavalkya hailed from Mithila, Gautama Buddha and Mahavira from Magadha. Two main illustrious rulers, the Mauryas and the Guptas flourished in this state. Therefore, through submitting this report I wish that remembering its past glory this state should rise up".[1]

This report refers to the practice of casteism in politics and mentions the names of persons at administrative posts of Bihar government whose vehicles were used in the elections of the concerned ministers. Role of castes in Bihar politics is not only a post-independent affair but as early as 1894 a local branch of the 'All India Kayastha Mahasabha' was established in Bihar.[2] On account of their education and high connections

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kayasthas had occupied high posts in government of Bihar. They were treated as the most forward caste in Bihar and like the enlightened Muslim houses of Bihar they had easy access to the British rulers in pre-independent Bihar. However, their number in Bihar Congress was more than that of the Muslims. In rural areas of Bihar they were dominant political force which is evident from their presence in the district boards of Bihar. In the beginning towns of Bihar were the centres of state politics. But gradually sentiment of caste politics was aroused in the remote village due to which the simple village life became comparatively more complicated and poisonous through the venture of capturing power by dint of caste votes.[3]

In fact the role of Kayasthas in Bihar politics came to light as a reaction to the dominance of Bengali community in state politics. Politics of Kayastha caste was linked primarily with the life and work of Sachchidananda Sinha who was born on 10 November 1871 in Ara district of Bihar. He had sad experience of Bihari identity in the daily life on the state of Bihar dominated by the Bengali bureaucrats in all walks of life. He proceeded for higher education in 1882 to England where

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also he had come across Indians before whom he was dubbed as Bihari without an identity. But intellectually he was free from the blemishes of caste sectarianism, because he stood for the formation of Bihar without break up of the Bengali cultural legacy which was deep rooted on the soil of Bengal proper. He came into contact with Max Muller who is said to have instructed him to write his correct name, with A.B. Keith who is said to have fired a zeal for preserving the indological sources in Bihar. He was very close to Kashiprasad Jayaswal (1879-1937) who also had assisted him in his mission of the formation of Bihar. Sachchidananda Sinha came back to India in 1893. Soon his castemen proposed an act of purification according to orthodox Hindu ritualism because of his foreign journey, but he strongly declined to comply with it. On account of this radical step no Kayastha family was ready to offer daughter for marriage with Sachchidananda Sinha, who ultimately married a lady of some Lall family of Lahore. In pursuit of making of Bihar he published some journals such as Bihar Herald, Bihar Times, Kayastha Samachar in 1896 for facilitating the causes of formation of Bihar and of linking the sub-castes of the Kayastha for removing social barriers respectively. He was active in creating the widest possible caste endogamy for extending

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the boundaries of marriage network among Kayastha sub-castes of Bihar. This type of the widest caste solidarity was visualised by him for the sake of superseding the political dominance of the Bengali elites in Bihar. He published a good number of booklets and pamphlets between 1906 and 1909 in order to bring the Kayasthas in the main streams of Bihar politics. The Kayastha Gazette was converted into the Hindustan Review and Kayastha Samachar was merged into the Bihar Times in 1910. Ultimately the issue of separation of Bihar from old Bengal province raised in 1911 was brought to reality through the making of Bihar in 1912. However, some landlords of Bihar and newspapers of Bengal severely criticised his campaign of the making of Bihar and levelled the charges of dividing a composite province and as anti-national one. However, it was not the consequence of street politics or mass politics but constitutional struggle in which his contemporaries such as Ali Imam, Ganesh Dutt Singh, Rajendra Prasad etc. had commendable share.[4] In 1929 he participated in the 35th Conference of 'All India Kayastha Mahasabha' at Delhi where he advocated the role of the Kayasthas in the main political stream of the country. In this connection he inspired his caste members to advance from caste to humanity and

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from provincialism to nationalism. He came into contact with Pyarelal Srivastava and got his full cooperation through the latter's Hindi journal Anjuman-e-Hindi. Sachchidananda Sinha gave unhindered support to the making of the province of Orissa as a separate province in 1936 and came very close to Gopa Bandhu, the father of Orissa. However, he was vigilant on this point for incorporation or retention of Chotanagpur with Bihar in order to facilitate the cause of industrialisation or material growth of Bihar province. Thus he was a liberal and highly practical to the maximum degree in the interest of Bihari identity which he realised successfully.

The consequent expansion in provincial services became beneficial to the Kayasthas and the Muslims and in order to stabilise this process when domicile rules were framed by the leaders of Bihar against the recruitment to the provincial services of persons from Bengal a bitter Bihari-Bengali dispute arose on the occasion of the formation of the Congress ministry in 1937.[5]

Dominance of the Kayasthas in public and political life of Bihar generated a sense of rivalry among the educated Bhumihar and Rajput castes. As early as 1878, the 'Bihar Landlords Association' had been established

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with its members spread in Bhumihar, Rajput, Brahman castes, who by the time of the formation of Bihar province had developed a keen sense of competition and zealousy. This encouraged the Bhumihar Landlords to establish their caste association known as 'Bhumihar Brahman Sabha' in 1899. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati searched and researched extensively the Sanskrit scriptures for proving the Brahmanical antecedents of the Bhumihars of Bihar for which he had advocated strongly from the pulpit of 'Akhil Bharatiya Brahman Sabha' in 1914 and six years later in 1920 he published a book in Hindi entitled Bhumihar Brahman Parichaya.

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati developed a bitter sense of hatred for the rich monks of Vaishnava monasteries where they were leading luxurious life. He recollected an incident of Srimadbhagavata wherein a conversation between Narasingh and Prahalad is described:

"प्रायेण देव मुनयः स्वविमुक्ति कामा,
मौनं चरंति विजने न परार्थनिष्ठा ।
नैतान् विहाय कृपणान् विमुमुक्ष एको,
नान्यत्वदस्य शरणं भ्रमतो नुपश्ये ।"

"It means that ancient sages are selfish, they live a lonely life for their personal salvation. They had no care for others. I do not like to do this. I do not wish for personal salvation leaving the sufferers in suffering.

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I shall live among them". In this way Swamiji involved himself in the main stream of politics through peasant struggle. In this connection he developed intimacy with his Bhumihar caste society. In 1920 he published another book entitled Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar. He advocated the cause of pure means for pure end. Gradually he faced difficulty in reconciling with the Bhumihar landlords, because they were using 'Bhumihar Brahmana Sabha' only for their selfish material purposes against the interest of poor peasant and share croppers. Ultimately in 1929 he extricated himself from this caste organisation on the occasion of its conference at Munger. However, Swamiji had no clear vision about the peasant struggle in Bihar. He had an idea of peaceful co-existence and adjustment between the landlords and the landless labourers or share croppers. He wanted to settle internal contradictions among the landlords, capitalists, landless workers and share croppers through pursuation and sermons. He got shocking experiences during relief work after the earthquake of 1934 when the landlord Bhumihars were hesitant to cooperate with his missiorary zeal. But despite all these feelings he had no clear vision of this struggle as Rahul Sankrityayan devoted his life to this cause in Bihar Kisan Sabha. Spiritual and

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religious obsessions of Swamiji were great impediments and in the heart of his heart the grains of sympathy for the Bhumihars of Bihar did not dry out. He encouraged the Bhumihars to spread education through establishing educational institutions in Bihar and thus a suitable caravan of educated Bhumihar Youth started coming to light after few decades. Now the Kayastha supremacy was challenged by Bhumihar political leaders on account of which 35 per cent of seats in 1935 were captured by the Bhumihars in Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee.[6] Rajputs had 14 per cent and Kayastha had 28 per cent in comparison to their position of 53 per cent in 1934. Both the Bhumihars and Rajputs had made much advancement in caste politics. Role of caste politics in an all India body of the Congress organisation was a question mark on its credibility of mass character political organisation. With a sense of repentance, the Chairman of the B.P.C.C., Rajendra Prasad writes: "We had to consider the caste of a person while deciding about the candidature. It was not a matter of satisfaction for Congress. But due to the exigencies of situation we could not avoid it. It was a matter of great shame and sadness that we could not forget caste. We had to think that if we do not choose a man of particular caste from a particular area it would

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have adverse effect on that particular caste and ultimately on the chances of success in election. Further we had also taken from castes in proportionate number so that we can please all the castes. This was not a happy situation for a nationalist organisation, but we had to do it."[7]

The above mentioned situation of caste politics in Bihar shows the trend of upper caste dominance and this trend continued unabeted even after independence upto 1977. However, after 1967 the caste compositions of general seats in 'Bihar Vidhan Sabha' and of the political parties and coalitions in power in 'Bihar Vidhan Sabha' during 1961-1977 indicate that caste force is the democratic incarnation of politics in Bihar. The upper castes were the first to acquire education and were the first also to benefit from political and administrative power. Gradually with expansion of the adult franchise and the growth of party system Yadav, Kurmi, Koeri, Bania and scheduled castes came in and with them came also the tribal and Muslim communities. Harry W. Blair has discussed this issue of caste and backward classes in Bihar very well coming to four important points of conclusion.[8] First, the transfer of power to the upper Backward classes (Bania, Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri) will continue at local level along political

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lines. Second, transfer of economic power in rural area to the Backward classes will be certain, because the Forward Castes will prove unable to cope with the aggressiveness, industry and profit oriented efforts of the Backward Castes. Third, there will be a continuing struggle between Backward and Forward Castes in the Legislative Assembly and even a series of alternating governments in the short terms. Lastly, the condition of landless labourers will decline, because the agricultural structure of the state of Bihar slowly moves from semi-feudalism to capitalism. It is said that Sachchidananda Sinha was the creator of modern Bihar, Srikrishna Sinha was the creator of a Forward Raj in Bihar and Karpoori Thakur was the creator of a Backward Raj.[9]

In case of Bihar it may be put with certainty that "politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realisation of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilise and consolidate positions. The important thing is organisation and articulation of strength and where politics is mass-based the point is to articulate support through the organisation in which the masses are

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to be found. It follows that where the caste structure provides one of the principal organisational clusters along which the bulk of the population is found to live, politics must strive to organise through such a structure. The alleged 'casteism in politics' is thus no more and no less than politicisation of caste".[10] In the light of this remark and social situation of Bihar group solidarity pertaining to caste, language and regional development cannot be dubbed. The traditional outlook on these subjects needs urgent change. There is no logic behind opposing the concept of caste when every human everywhere in the world is practising group politics. However, it is important to distinguish the objective behind the caste solidarity. The moment it becomes the source of social conflict and instrument of domination of particular caste it must be opposed. So long as the caste solidarity works for self-preservation and self-improvement on the basis of merit and achievement and equips the members of the caste to face competition in political or any other field in daily life for survival it is indeed a positive trait and has to be supported. Those who are Marxists need for strong adherence to its theory and practice in consonance with the prevalent political and social conditions of Bihar. We all know how the guilds worked

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in the west. The guilds preserved the expertise but at the same time acted as an obstacle to the spread of that expertise like the chartered accountants, doctors, company secretaries and attorneys and the like in the modern society. The doctors have received medical education with the governmental subsidy but despite the oath taken by the medical practitioner that he would endeavour to give redress to the sick and make all efforts to save the patients, the doctors fled from Surat, when the spread of plague made its presence there. When a judicial commission of enquiry finds administrative officers guilty they escape punishment, because the casteist Public Service Commission refused to concur in their punishment. Even when one makes a valid allegation against a judge, the judge can punish him under the contempt of court of law irrespective of the point whether the allegation is true or not. The very same judge, against whom the charge is made, prosecutes and punishes the citizen. Very much the same thing happens in the case of the so called breach of privileges "of members of legislatures and Parliament. Under the official secrets Act a citizen can be punished even if what he writes is correct to the last detail.

So caste remains, if under different nomenclatures.

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One cannot buy or sell a share without paying their brokers. No one, not a broker has access into the stock market. The traditional castes are not so rigid and are in any case subject to the same law of the land as men of other castes etc. So finally everything is dependent on definition and not on substance. In this context traditional caste solidarity is the only safeguard for the poor and the unprivileged. So the utility of caste status in competitive democratic condition of politics cannot be denied when the turn of Yadav, Kurmi, Koeri and Bania castes is a burning issue in addition to those of the scheduled castes and tribes.

However, reservation is a different matter altogether-particularly in higher and technical education and jobs. Higher education and jobs must be according to merit and not according to caste. Enough of scholarship should be provided in the pre-college stage to enable educationally backward sections to come up in quality. But an unqualified or inadequately qualified person ought not to be employed. In the name of supporting minorities Muslims are being provided a quota. Then why not Bengalis, who are as much minority in Bihar, Assam, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and all over India ? Why not a quota for Bihari,

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Brahmins, Kayasthas, Rajputs, Bhumihars and so on ? Are they not human beings with the same needs as the Yadavas, Koeris, Muslims and so on and do they not deserve a job.? The biggest number of educated unemployed are the Bengalis but does any one consider their plight even when they are amongst the poorest in India ? Much poorer than many Yadavas, Koeris, Rajputs, Bhumihars and so on ? Why is Punjab or Kashmir singled out for the largesse of the Central Government out of taxes paid by the Bengalis, Biharis, Tamils and not the unemployed Bengalis in West Bengal?

The over centralised government system has given rise to myriads of distortions. For many years the over centralised Medical Council of India did not allow new medical colleges or medical schools (which are the need of the hour - India had them under the British) to be set-up by any one who had no pull with the Central Government, not necessarily on merit. Now the fees have been made sky-high to prevent even meritorious among the poor from getting the benefit of medical and technical education. Elitism affects even the students as one may see in Bihar there is opposition to the setting up of new medical colleges from medical students themselves. In the sixties many Engineering College seats were not filled up, not

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because of lack of the qualified applicants but solely because of the Central Government's policy to restrict higher professional education. One cannot become a chartered accountant or an attorney unless you get an article-ship in a firm of chartered accountants, or an attorney, as the case may be, and these firms are, however, under no obligation to offer any to other concessions.

Bihar had one time in the sixties as many as five Union Cabinet Ministers simultaneously. Yet during that period Bihar was starved of the central investment funds and private investment funds. Even after nearly four decades the Haldia complex in West Bengal remains undeveloped - solely because of the discrimination by the bureaucracy (dominated everywhere by the non-Bengalis) in New Delhi, the Ministers remaining rubber stamps. Despite the large Bengali population, in the last thirty years no Bengali in the Central Cabinet had a proper portfolio. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee represented Gujarat and actively denied the benefits of the Finance Commission recommendations to West Bengal and Bihar. The present Railway Minister C.K. Jaffer Sharief has taken all railway projects to Karnataka and nobody seems to know about them. But when Satya Narayan Sinha extended the railway line in undeveloped Bihar there was a tumultuous hue and cry.

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And just for modernising one single railway station - Maldah - in West Bengal, Abu Barkat Abdul Ghani Khan Choudhury was nicknamed Minister for Maldah by the media of New Delhi, Bombay and Madras.

Marxists must not overlook the class factor while considering caste. Jagjivan Ram and his children are of much upper class, even though they formally belong to some lower caste. This is true of Ambedkar. Caste solidarity is no substitute for CLASS consciousness. Please consider if any so-called backward caste people have contributed so much to the popularisation of the concept of equality as the high-caste Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Rabindranath Tagore- all of whom were Brahmins - Acharya P.C. Ray, Sri Jagdish Chandra Bose, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee have done.

How many affluent backward caste Biharis have done so much for the spread of education as the Bhumihar

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leader Ganesh Dutt Singh or some Kayastha leaders of Bihar have done ? And these educational facilities are by no means meant only for their caste men; Ganesh Dutt declined to receive pay from the Government, saying he did not need the money. But the Government would not heed that request; so Ganesh Dutt himself took a token salary of rupee one only and the rest Rs. 4999-00 (four thousand nine hundred ninety nine) was donated to the cause of education. Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav is a minister in the Central Government, can't he set some phanmacy colleges in Bihar ? What has Bali Ram Bhagat done for Bihar ? What relief the village Yadav has got?

Education holds the key to progress. All casteism must be employed to the spread of merit (and not of privilege which gives no strength to the individual and thus cannot be a source of strength over a long time - although the strength is the need.) Education enhances man's ability, widens horizon. Text must be there in the language of the student and citizen and not only the rehash that we see in the name of text books.

Perils and power of caste status in Bihar politics have come to a saturation point so much so that scheduled castes do not like to be called or classed as dalits or

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harijans. In this connection they have become critical of Gandhian nomenclature. They prefer to revive their separate identity and like to reinterpret their traditional status as chamar, halkhor (methar) or bhanghi, dom, dusadh etc. to buttress their present aspirations and have developed mythologies about them. For example the worship of the Raha baba is getting popularity. In fact this Raha baba is an articulation of the worship of varaha cult connected with the boar which is their domestic animal, although this episode is associated with a process of Brahmanisation of these castes. Varaha cult is equally popular among these so-called untouchable castes. The neo-Buddhists in the wake of Ambedkarite Buddhist movement have aroused this characteristic feeling in order to establish their hold over Bodh-gaya temple where a large number of Buddhists have flocked from Nagpur and have captured the organisation of 'All India Buddhist Bhikkhu, Sangha.' Their militant youth organisation in the name of the Dalit Tiger is active in Bihar. The extremist left political parties of South Bihar including MCC and Party Unity are assisting them for their own ends, but the untouchable castes have little illusion about their own ends. Bahujan Samaj Party under the leadership of Kanshi Ram and Mayavati has created miracles for

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strengthening the grip of the scheduled castes over politics of the Dalits in their respective areas.

Consequently as many as ten apartments were built in quick succession in different areas of Patna for accommodating hundreds of untouchables who were living in dungeons of mid Patna town. These places were under the targets of urban lords who had clandestine plan to dislodge them. Besides dozens of Rain Baseras (night shelters) throughout Patna beside the main road and prominent streets have added much to their existence. However, the zealous upper caste leaders have got bitter criticism in their stock against these constructions accomplished by the Bihar Chief Minister. The jocular comments about Charwaha Vidyalayas opened throughout Bihar in the declivity of rural regions are supplementary evidences of vulgar critique pumped up by the upper caste or Forward leaders of Bihar. It is said that the main intention of Foward leaders is to reduce the credibility of backward ruling caste-association, because their callous motive to dispossess the untouchables of their position in the heart of Patna town was foiled by the act of building apartments for the neglected lot of Bihar. It is well-known that for centuries the untouchables have been dubbed as persons worthy of dwelling out side the settlements of the ideal Hindu Society.

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A rally of the caste federation consisting of Ravidas dom, mehtar, mushahar, pasi etc. was held on 5 February 1993. The rally was addressed by Bihar's Chief Minister who inaugurated it and George Fernandes, Sharad Yadav, Nitish Kumar, R.P. Yadav, Lalchand Matho were the distinguished guests. They also expressed their feelings for mobilising the scheduled castes in favour of Janata Dal. Twenty-six point demands in published form were put on the occasion. These demands are concerned with the fulfilment of humble material necessities of daily life of these people. According to the census of 1991 the total population of Bihar is eight crore sixtythree lakh which may rise upto ten crore within ten years ahead. Of this about 14.5 per cent population is of the scheduled castes and about 12.5 percent is of the scheduled tribes. If average unit of the family consisting of five members is supposed to exist, then fifty-four lakh pucca houses have to be constructed. One thousand five hundred rupees are to be spent for one such house and is estimated for the untouchable family of five members. Total amount comes to eighty one hundred crore of rupees. This panicky data is being hazarded time and again in the light of limited resources of Jawahar Rozgar Yojna and Indira Awas Yojana. But nobody refers to the mission of social justice for the untouchables

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whom the upper caste leadership has still dubbed them as pitiable lot of Bihari Society as painted by Fahien (A.D. 399-414). In fact these neglected castes have to be judged in the light of their choice, their perception of social liberation based on democracy, secularism and equality. It is also a heart searching point that all those who make hue and cry over Mayavati's tirade against Gandhiji have done nothing to promote the task of the constructive programmes visualised by him as early as 1917 on the soil of Bihar (Champaran) on the occasion of Indigo unrest. In Bihar politics, social justice comes before or parallel to economic betterment of this neglected lot. Dalit Sena which is committed to get social justice through its tactical line is not supposed to be uttered as mere Naxalite outfits. The sena is of the Dalits, by the Dalits and for the welfare of the Dalits. It is the credit of the present Bihar ruling class that has awakened and infused courage among the Dalits and the backwards to realise their democratic right and social status in the present set up of the society. Two heinous events concerning outrage of dignity of harijan ladies in Samastipur and Darbhanga district (13 July and 20 September 1994) are testimony to the attitude of the

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upper castes whose leaders are critical of social justice and principles of equality. There is a proverb in the Bhojpuri speaking area that virtue is far away, meanwhile the sin has drowned the being in water and killed him. In the light of social justice and caste politics one cannot deny the positive gains of backward politics of Bihar. The present leadership of Bihar politics has been aided by its adaptness at political manoeuvering and manipulations. It is said that anti-Laloo campaign has been launched for sabotaging backward caste unity by which the backwards have improved their socio-political status. In fact as the champion of social justice and communal harmony the present leadership has infused a new spirit and hope among the unprivileged sections of society. The present leadership is supposed to uphold this unity among the poor sections of society: without allowing discrimination against any caste.

The caste system and its prime importance in society of Bihar is as old as the Vedic period. The reference of Varna and its later articulations into as many as twenty-two professional castes occurs in the tenth Mandala of the Purushasukta of the Rigveda". The 90th hymn of the tenth Mandala was composed on the soil of Bihar somewhere on the bank of the river Sadanira(Gandaka) where

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history of Bihar. Extreme manifestation of the reservation policy, such as reservation for promotion has been severely criticized and forms the back-lash character of the reservation movement. In fact reservation is a step in the direction of social correction through the intervention of the Bihar state in the light of social justice. This is in consonance with the post-independent tradition of social development in Bihar which has been master-minded by the leaders of castes, politicians and government personnels without people's participation at the basic root. The questions of special opportunity to the castes and classes were deliberately marginalised. For centuries doors of opportunity of literacy, education and jobs were kept jammed to the unprivileged castes and classes. Naturally the endeavour of the present Bihar politicians for using caste as a rallying ground in order to gain votes in elections has become an unavoidable strategy which actually consolidates the caste structure in Bihar. Further this has led to the introduction of a new vigour for perpetuating the newly achieved dominance of the entrenched castes and caste associations in Bihar. Therefore, the mass participation of backward, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes has become an headache to those who are accustomed to enjoy the social privileges for past

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centuries. But it is now definite that the competitive democratic politics of Bihar through its secularising and modernising efforts will succeed and is bound to leave an impact on larger scale in our society.

Above all political articulation of castes in Bihar is advancing also, because its emphasis is on the redressal and requisition of social justice and political status for power without any threat to the integrity of Bihar state. The old Triveni Sangh of Yadav, Kurmi and Koiri formed as early as 1937 had been revived during the period of Bihar movement under Jayaprakash Narayan's leadership. Its solidarity has been broken down by recent split under the leadership of Nitish Kumar, but its reincarnation as Lawakush Mahasabha consisting of Kurmi and Koiri has taken place. Its rally was held in the month of September this year at Srikrishna Memorial Auditorium, adjacent to Gandhi Maidan at Patna where members of these two castes had assembled. But they had serious reservations on the point of sudden break from Janata Dal and their caste leaders hailing from stronghold area of landlordism of south Bihar were not fully convinced of the logic of split. The worst part of these backward caste associations in Bihar is that they had been, from the beginning, very ruthless towards the

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scheduled castes of their areas. In this case their basic interest in caste politics is economic which advances the cause of their vested landed property. Besides, the interesting part of this caste politics is that landlords hail from backward and forward castes. Mahavir Mahto of Belchi village led a gang of musclemen and massacred eleven agricultural workers including his own castemen. In Begusarai district Bhumihar landlords were dead against their own castemen who were under the influence of C.P.I. In Nalanda and Nawada districts of Bihar, Kurmis and Yadavs united to give a tough fight to Bhumihar-Rajput combine, but when that struggle boomeranged against the Kurmian Landlords, they in alliance with forward castes attacked the Yadavas. So ethics of caste politics becomes ineffective on the anvils of economic interest.

In fact rich peasants employ agricultural labourers of all castes (Chamar, dusadh, muslim, kurmi, kamkar, yadav, koiri and so on). This opportunity of working together has infused an interest of class for the sake of realising minimum wages from the landlords. Under the influence of left parties, specially the Maoist Communist Centre, Party Unity and Indian People's Front, these peasant labourers unite on trade union lines,

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generally indulging in bloody confrontations. Massacres of Belchi (1977), Pathadda (1977), Gopalpur (1977), Dharampura (1977), Chhaoradano (East Champaran, 1977) and recently at Manra and Belaur (1994) are the incidents, pertaining to class struggle. Casteless peasant struggle in Bihar has, however, become a riddle inspite of valid logic of its economic credibility. Every caste contains class in itself and every class contains caste in itself. In Bhojpur region of Bihar Sahar, Sandesh, Piro, Danwar, Bihta, Ugana, Andhari Sahar, and in East Champaran, Chhaoradano, Tinkoni, Sukhlahia, Darpa etc. master-minded political leaders of left adherence are active and each one of them holds shocking history of class struggle, partial success of land occupation and above all, heart rending episodes of martyrdom. Lastly these stances have by this time become touching stories of sacrifices of talented youths.

Some lessons and observations about the class politics in Bihar may be eye opening. Defensive violence and violence at the saturation point of revolutionary fervour had been acceptable to the people involved in them. But offensive violence against isolated man or non-committed man put to hit-list has been raising bitterness in class

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essence of left politics of Bihar which is being used by the caste force in its favour. The worst part of the class based struggle is that in many cases left political leaders have abandoned the peasant struggle at various stages and times in Bihar. From the pre-independent peasant struggles to 1994, two hundred forty five cases may be enumerated (1938-1994 September) on Bihar that suffered pitiable infanticide. Lack of continuity and pursuation, family relation between landlords and left leaders, to a limited extent caste affiliation of left leaders with landlords, personal friendship, the worst issue of appeasement had been some reasons that prevented and are preventing the growth of left politics in Bihar. Lastly class consciousness has been weakened by a good many strings of age long superstition which are persisting in family premises of the leaders of the left wings. Very well it has been observed that "In India because of the existence of the caste system, class struggle assumed a specific form which was unknown elsewhere".[12] "Just as for the ruling class, so for the masses, use of force is only the final ultimate power, while struggle on the cultural front is, and should be, a continuing process".[13] "It is idle, just to preach the unity of the common people belonging to all castes and communities without taking

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steps to see that the common people themselves begin to see their unity".[14] There is a pithy line which might have echoed against the walls of the party offices of left parties of Bihar. "In Bengal, the comrades fondly believe, politics and society are informed by sophisticated notions of equality, and caste.[15]

Bihar politics is of special interest on account of minority community and its valid political identity. Mandalisation of Muslims incarnated on the soil of Bihar. It has been criticised as a divisive plot to disintegrate Muslims of Bihar through reservation on the basis of religion. It is well known that MY stands for Muslims and Yadavs in Bihar. Bihar Vidhan Sabha has three eminent leaders among backward Muslims, Ghulam Sarwar, Speaker, Iliyas Hussain, road construction minister and Mumtaz Ansari. It is calculated in Bihar that the moment the danger of BJP recedes the support of forward Muslims of Bihar will be vulnerable and will be eroded, because their support is supposed to be for security point of view. It is said that in the wake of the departure of forward Muslim intellectuals and political leaders of Bihar for Pakistan after independence, a suitable chance for emergence of backward Muslim leadership was created through induction of Abdhi Qayam Ansari in

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Council of Ministers of Bihar Government. "The recent creation of Backward Muslim Morcha shows that the Mandal wine is not forbidden (Haram) for Bihari Muslims".[16] During last Id, therefore, only the upper caste Muslims turned up and the Mandal supporters absented themselves. The Mandalita Muslims of present day Bihar condemned those Bihari Muslims as traitors who migrated to Pakistan and later most of the unemployment benefits given to the weavers of the Madrasas were grabbed by them. As in the Hindu backward classes or castes so in the backward Muslim castes the kulahiyas and Bhatia castes have started clamouring for induction of their castes into the reservation list. In order to accelerate the process of Mandalisation the backward Muslims such as the Momins, Raeens (vegetable growers, called also Kunjra), Mansooris (Dhuniya), Chiks etc. had already shown their pre-Laloo gestures through well-organised caste conventions. Every group of these backward Muslims shares certain stable traditions and characteristics in consonance of their profession which have enabled them in realising their separate identities and spelling out their aspirations. Their demands in the democratic system of present Bihar are nothing but some material and social safeguards which, in the name of social justice, are for preservation of

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their ethnic identities with religion and culture which are their precious heritage. Therefore, one cannot deny that present Bihar ruling class is securing high marks in the acid test of democracy, its efficient working as a system in a given situation of financial stringencies due to strained centre-state relations. This can be measured by the fair, equitable and just treatment meted out to the minority communities without indulging in jocular comments frequently fanned by the Forward Castes that the Bihar ruling class suffers from the pastoral gestures of the clouts of its leader obsessed with the derailed concepts of Mandal, Charvaha Vidyalaya and social justice.

Lastly the tribal politics may also be assessed in this continuity of the role of the community and Bihar politics. As early as 1929-1930 a christian tribal educated youngman hailing from Chotanagpur area, Jaipal Singh was serving under the Bikaner native estate from where he had to abandon his job and came to Bihar. The disgruntled Bengali community of Bihar patronised him for forming the well-known Jharkhand Party with an aversion to the Hindus and the Congress Party.[17] Those days land relations between the tenants of the tribal belt of south Bihar and the local Zamindars, generally called as the Dikkus (outsiders) were bitterly strained.[18] A similar unrest had also erupted

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in Champaran-Nepal border area in regard to the Tharus among whom the cruel Indigo zamindar, Mr. Amon with the connivance of the local zamindar, Ramraja of Ramnagar, having Nepali antecedents was active. However, a leaderless Tharu discontent was crushed silently despite a historical Gandhian politics experimented in this area.[19] Thus the tribal politics with this background has assumed ferocity in modern Bihar. Atrocities against the tribal community are the causes for the emergence and growth of extreme political activity in Chotanagpur, i.e. south Bihar. Nimiaghat, Bagodar, Pirtand, Dumri, Madhuban (Giridih)mufassil areas are centres of the Laikiandis, trained by the Maoist communist centre for facing the accesses of the landlords of the regions, which had been for the last se veral decades the targets of local zamindars for the fulfilment of their sexual orgies and economic exploitation. Spread of literacy and political ideology among them has been boon for the tribal people who have set up their own espionage system appreciated even by the state police. Even the chaukidars prefer to obey them as their orders are in favour of social justice and general welfare of the lot of the locality. Negligence of the area with the connivance of local landlords and the jungle mafia tagged with the forest officers creates hurdles

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in the development plans which are plundered. In addition to Rajput and Bhumihar landlords the intermediate backward castes such as the Suris (wine sellers) and the Telis practise usury generally capturing the landed assets of the tribals.

In fact the decision makers want complete destruction of the communal combination or the feeling of oneness among the tribals of Jharkhand so that there never will be any substantial resistance from them in future or plunder of the community will continue unabated.[20] This is evident from the Subarnarekha (Koel-Karo Projects). This project has dislodged a large number of the tribal people. Besides, sexual exploitation of tribal women, crude treatment meted out to their male partners are testimonies to their deprivation and deceit. Forest Dak Bungalows have become virtually vice-dens for outraging the modesty of tribal ladies which later or sooner were burnt down on many places. Wanton destruction of forests followed, because the traditional sal-trees of the tribals were cut down and they were replaced by the Teak plants. These are certain cases of tribal unrest that in politics of Bihar has got fresh political articulation of Kolhanistan and Jharkhand.[21] The ancestral obsession of the tribals has been countered by the

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establishment with a notion that the tribals are nomadic lot of the past and are now resorting to the Purung (पुरंग) cycle (a cycle of seven-ten years) of shifting the cultivation. History of the Sabhagat movement, revolutionary role of Santhal and Kol insurrections is being forgotten by the policy makers and their practical application agencies. During the period from 1980 to 1989, shocking incidents of the Dola system came to light which led to severe revolutionary unrest with agenda of destruction of the fortresses of local landlords belonging to Rajput and Bhumihar castes.[22] Then also contributions to tribal disorders by the atrocities of the private armies, such as the Sunlight Sena patronised by the famous Mawar house of Palamau, branches of the Brahmarshi Sena, Lorik Sena, Kuar Sena etc. cannot be dubbed. At any rate the ethnic movement in Bihar can be diverted to the politics of adjustment and compromise through taking socio-economic reforms with a will to implement them otherwise they will be a bundle of waste on water. Finally we may state that "increased mass awareness of civil and democratic rights has led to an opening up of new political spaces in which political movements and parties would be well placed to raise the demands of the backward castes, scheduled castes, Dalits, Adivasis and other oppressed sections of society. This has constituted the backbone of present Bihar politics the progressive potential of which cannot be ignored".[23]

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2. L. Carol, "Kayastha Samachar - From a Caste to the National Newspaper", Economic and Social History Review, vol. 10, 1977, pp. 280-292.

3. Anugrah Narain Singh, Mere Sansmarana (Hindi), Kitab Sansar, Laheriasarai (Bihar), 1942, p. 96; Ramashray Roy, " Caste and Political recruitment in Bihar", Caste in Indian Politics (ed.), Rajni Kothari, Orient Longmans (Pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, 1970, pp. 238-244.

4. Sachchidananda Sinha, Some Eminent Bihar Contemporaries, 1944 (Patna); reprinted by Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 1972.

5. Manindra Narain Ray, " The Bihar I Know", The Indian Nation, Patna, 14 December 1964; Anugrah Narain Singh, Op.Cit., pp. 174-176, 182-183, 197-202, 223, 291-318. Caste competition was bitter in pre-independent Bihar. When Gaya district board was dismissed, Rajendra Prasad, the then Chairman of B.P.C.C. in his address to a meeting took it seriously, because the whole issue had been cooked by Ganesh Dutt Singh whom he compared with Jaichand and Mirzafar.

6. Ramashray Roy , Op.Cit., p. 242.

7. Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, Navajivan Prakashan, Ahmedabad, 1957, pp. 555-556. These days the Bhumihars of Bihar were frantically anxious to propagate their Brahmanical origins. They were discovering new theories for showing their most ancient antecedents. They compared Bhumihars with the Chitpavan Brahmans of Maharashtra, sometimes with the Tyagi Brahmans of Western U.P., sometimes

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with the Desais of Gujarat and so on. However, Professor Ravinder Kumar, in his learned work, entitled Western India in the 19th Century: A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968), writes that "Prior to the British conquest of 1818, the administration of Maharashtra was dominated by the Chitpavans, who possessed greater intellectual agility and political acumen than the Deshasths, and who were able consequently to exercise a more profound influence over the region. Indeed the members of the Chitpavan caste virtually shaped the style of life in Maharashtra before 1818, through their close connections with the Peshwas, and through the social and political power which this connection bestowed on them. The caste produced men of distinction in politics, in the field of scholarship and in art of war. True, there were the Chitpavans steeped in the unlovely intrigues of court life who struck even the sympathetic observer as 'intriguing, lying, corrupt, licentious and unprincipled". (p.38) He further writes that "the Chitpavan Brahmans of Maharashtra were not only linked to the Kunbis and other inferior castes through common religious values but they also enjoyed special position of predominance to which there exists no parallel in the rest of India. This was particularly true of Chitpavan brahmans, who had come to occupy many important positions in the administration, and who had also been awarded substantial grants in land after the accession to power of the Peshwas, who were their caste-fellows". (p.43) "Of the significant concentrations of power in society, namely, the institution of religion, the administration and ownership of land, the Chitpavans virtually controlled the three... This is merely to assert that the privileges enjoyed by the Chitpavans through their special ties with the Peshwas enabled them to dominate the rest of the community (p.44). These points show that in no way the Chitpavans were to be compared with the Bhumihars or the so-called Bhumihar Brahmans of Bihar. Similarly their claims to be compared with the Tyagi Brahmans of U.P. or the Desais of Gujarat are baseless.

8. Harry W. Blair, "Rising Kulaks and Backward classes in Bihar; Social change in the late 1970s", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XV, No. 2, January 12, 1980, pp. 64-74.

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9. Ibid. , pp. 71-74. Harry W. Blair stayed in Bihar for studying the socio-political implications of elections during 1970s, examined the political behaviour in about fourteen constituencies of Patna and Gaya districts. He found that the dominant castes had a tradition of leading at the polls. According to him political competition was more intra-caste than inter-caste and to some extent cooptation took place and the dominant castes had to come to compromise on many points for the support of the lower castes. As the castes moved up in the political scale, they reached a phase of differentiation based on principles which were more universalistic than caste oriented one.

10. Rajni Kothari (ed.), Caste in Indian Politics, op. cit, Intr. p. 4-5.

11. A.B. Keith and Macdonell (ed.), The Vedic Index, Vol. II. pp. 245-250; A.L. Basham, Wonder that was India, pp. 243-244, (This shows the basic doctrine of the Brahmans in north India from 900 B.C. onwards and left its mark on Hinduism in the exaltation of the Brahmana.) 66

"When they divided the Man,
Into how many parts did they divide him ?
What was his mouth, what were his arms,
What were his thighs and his feet called ?

"The brahmana was his mouth,
of his arms were made the Warrior,
His thighs became the Vaisya,
of his feet the Sudra was born."

This hymn (x,90) assumed great normative importance for ordering of the Hindu society. The four varnas served as general categories for various castes (Jatis), as individual castes were called, because one is born (jata) into a caste. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, compiled by Vasant Moon; Vol. III, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1987, pp. 1-95, "Philosophy of Hinduism", "It is indisputable that the Vedas lay down the theory of four varnas in the Purushasukta. This recognises two basic

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principles. It recognises the division of society into four sections as an ideal. It also recognises that the ideal relationship between the four sections is inequality.... The Brahmins who were the authors of the whole body of Hindu Religious Literature - except the Upanishad took good care to inject the doctrines formulated by them in the Smriti , into the Vedas and the Geeta. Nothing is to be gained in picking and choosing between them. The philosophy of Hinduism will be the same whether one takes the Manu Smriti as its Gospel or or whether one takes the Vedas and the Geetas as the Gospel of Hinduism." S.V. Desoka Char, Caste, Religion and Country: A View of Ancient and Medieval India, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 18-19. "We have hazy picture of caste proliferation over the centuries. P.V. Kane discounts the view that the reference to the four varnas in the Purushasukta hymn of the Rigveda was only conceptual. In his view in the vedic period the varnas represented the real divisions of society, at least to a very great extent, if not cent per cent, and the references had a ring of contemporary reality". G.S. Ghurye, Vedic India, Bombay, 1970, clear glimpse of the caste groups is noticed in the Jataka texts. All these views indicate that the caste system was well established by the beginning of the historical period in India. The Muslim invasions led to several political, social upheavals. The socio-political turmoils under the Bhakti and Sufi movements, changes in economic orders on account of the Arab and European communities created grave situation for caste proliferation.

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14. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Twenty Months in Kerala: A Retrospect, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1959, p. 50.

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18. Ibid., p. 476.

19. Ibid., p. 292.

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21. Ibid.

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